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RECOLLECTIONS OF GEORGE SAND.

BY MADAME ADAM.

DURING the years 1868-1869 George Sand wrote to us more than once as follows : “ My friends, I start for X—— in search of a scene for a romance ; will you accompany me ? ” We always seized the opportunity with joy. The particular trip which I shall describe served as a frame for the novel *Malgré Tout*, of which the Empress Eugenie was generally said to be the heroine. I never asked Mme. Sand whether this was true, for she would have been sure to answer me as she had a hundred times before : “ While I always make use of my own observations in my books I do not write novels *à clef*.”

Madame Sand had come to Paris from Nohant, and one morning we all—M. Adam, Edmond Planchut, my daughter and myself—started for Ste. Ménéhould. M. Adam and Mme. Sand adored the game of dominoes, which they played with great skill. They always carried a set with them when going on a journey and no sooner would we have started than they would begin making the most amazing combinations. They would have nearly worked out some wonderful mathematical problem, when the train, with a sudden movement, would send the baggage, and, of course, the dominoes, in all directions, which would put us into fits of laughter and them into a very bad temper. In another instant, however, all would be serene once more, and they would start again with more enthusiasm than ever.

George Sand was much attached to Edmond Planchut. We called him “ the shipwrecked one ” (*le naufragé*), for he had really been shipwrecked on one of the islands of the Philippine group, in a Belgian sailing vessel, and had narrowly escaped death by the capsizing of a small boat containing seventeen of his companions. Cast upon the coast without any resources and with their clothes

in shreds they were afraid to venture inland. They lived for several days on shellfish. Despair finally seized them all, and more than once they longed for death. Edmond Planchut, however, volunteered to go in search of relief for himself and his comrades.

They all thought him mad, but nevertheless were willing to help him in an adventure that could not possibly put them in a worse plight than that in which they found themselves. Planchut started out alone, carrying under his arm a little casket, which, with his clothes, was all he had saved from the wreck. On the road he encountered some kindly folk who brought him to the Spanish governor, a young man who had not yet had time to learn that one can be severe without being cruel. In vain did Planchut tell him of his sorry plight, and of the miserable condition of his seventeen companions.

"Who will guarantee me that you are not bandits?" asked the governor. "Why should I put you on your road again? You have not a single paper by which to establish your identity."

"I have some letters addressed to myself, and they are in this casket," replied Planchut; "they can establish my identity. In Europe these letters would possess the value that they have for me, but how can I suppose that the person who wrote them will be known to you?"

"Known or not—what can these letters prove?" said the governor unrelenting. "You may have stolen them."

"Here are my letters from George Sand—stolen!" repeated poor Planchut, indignant at being insulted in his misery.

"What! letters from George Sand!" exclaimed the governor. "Can it be true?"

Planchut had already gained the door, having lost all hope. He turned round again, however, the tone in which the young man had pronounced the name of George Sand having once more kindled hope in his breast.

"Show me those letters," cried the governor.

Planchut opened the casket, and the young Spaniard, who had passed a year in study in Paris, and who was a fanatic on the subject of our great romancer, read George Sand's letters carefully, and then questioned the "wrecked one" as to their contents, Planchut's answers being of course correct. From that moment for-

ward the governor treated him as a friend, and sending for his companions, put them all on the first Spanish vessel that was leaving the port.

Madame Sand experienced great pleasure, as half laughingly and half seriously she listened to Planchut when he told her this story. M. Adam, however, never ceased teasing "the shipwrecked one" by declaring that he did not believe a word of the story, that he did it to let Madame Sand experience the joys of Monsieur Perrichon; and Madame Sand reproached Adam for his scepticism, while Planchut defended himself with devilish ingenuity. Nothing could have been more amusing than that scene.

George Sand's two leading traits were goodness and generosity. I have never seen her display her superiority in the smallest degree. Her benevolence and charity to the unfortunate throughout her life were unsurpassed.

We arrived at Ste. Ménéhould, that celebrated town rather vulgarly re-named, "Pigs' feet," and went to a small "town hotel," with an enormous kitchen at the end of which was an immense open fireplace, in which large fagots glowed and crackled. We were all famished. Madame Sand relieved us by ordering something to eat. We were then shown to our rooms, and had an hour to make our toilets.

Some commercial travellers had just left the rooms to which we were assigned. While I was opening the windows to air the room—and it was necessary to do so—my daughter and M. Adam had been searching in all directions for somewhere to wash. I heard their exclamations, followed by laughter. I was soon laughing myself, when Madame Sand, Planchut, M. Adam and my daughter returned each with a small jug in one hand containing about a pint of water. Obviously the people who had been in the hotel before us had never washed themselves! One can imagine what fun we had when on asking for more water the landlady sent us word that we would surely ruin her ceilings! But if water was scarce, the wine was perfect, the cooking succulent, and food abundant in the Hotel de Ste. Ménéhould. We found our dinner excellent, and we were all in fine trim to enjoy it.

The next day Madame Sand and M. Adam went together to visit the battlefield of Valmy. At breakfast they had a long chat about the celebrated countermarch of Dumouriez, who in 1792 blocked the Duke of Brunswick's route to Chalons and to Paris.

M. Adam, whom Monsieur Thiers called "the General," wished us to join him in his enthusiasm over Dumouriez, and with the aid of forks and salt-cellars explained to us on the breakfast table the position of the two armies so graphically that my daughter and myself understood the situation at once and joined our admiration to that of our strategist.

"If the Prussians return to France, which I think is very unlikely," said M. Adam, "our defence against invasion has become classic, and our generals could not forget Valmy."

"Don't predict war, Adam," replied Mme. Sand; "it has become impossible in our humane epoch, thank God. The Prussians won't make war against us, and we won't be indiscreet enough to declare it against them."

During the Austro-Prussian war I saw much of Heftzer, the founder of *Le Temps* and one of the few French people who favored Austria. Heftzer was a Strasbourger and knew the ways of Germany. I am from Picardy and was brought up on souvenirs of the invasion. How many times had they told me the words of the Germans in 1815: "We will return."

I hate the Prussians, who, with the English, are the enemies who bear most hatred towards the Picards.

"After the Austrians," said I to Mme. Sand, "it will be our turn. You will see that the Prussians will make war upon us; they have thought of nothing else since Jéna. If you read their school books, you would not doubt it. I think the war is probable, and I am not afraid of it."

"War is horrible," replied Mme. Sand. "Heaven preserve France from it. A series of calamities would be preferable, because war surpasses any number of misfortunes heaped upon one another."

"The Empire is war," added Adam, "because the Empire cannot give liberty. Does it desire liberty? France will allow it to continue eighteen or twenty years, never longer, and Napoleon III. will soon require to make another move.

"Why!" he added, "I met Thiers recently—we were leaving the Legislature together—and he said to me as follows, word for word: 'Adam, it is you who are in the right. There is nothing possible in France but the Republic. The day that the Emperor discovers that he will have to choose between the Republic and war, he will choose war; and never at any period of our history

were we so badly prepared for it.'” Monsieur Thiers made this statement to M. Adam in the Spring of 1869.

The carriage which was to convey us to Verdun—a large open vehicle with two horses, was ready. It was to have us at Verdun in four hours—so they said. It was then half past eleven in the morning, but it was nine o'clock that night when we arrived at that place which Quesnay de Beaurepaire defended so heroically, and which he refused to surrender to the allies, and set fire to in preference to giving up the keys.

The route to Islettes was monotonous. Mme. Sand was disappointed with it. She looked to the right and to the left, and nothing escaped her on the road that we traversed.

“I won't have a note to make of to-day's excursion,” she said; “let us sup at once and go to bed so as to be up early in the morning. I hope that the ‘Dames de Meuse’ will have something better in store for us than what we have been treated to on the road from Dumoniez to Brunswick.”

My daughter and I slept in the same bed, as there were only three rooms to be had at the hotel, which was filled with officers from the garrison. Tired out, and with the prospect of getting up early, we retired at once and went to sleep, but we were soon awakened by feeling a legion of bugs crawling over us. I lighted my candle—horrors! our sheets, our night-clothes were covered with bugs, which seemed to be raining down from the top of the bed. We jumped up and called “General” Adam, who was sleeping in the next room. He came in and declared that he would disperse the hideous battalion, which had, however, been already put to flight by the light, and gave us his bed. We slept for three or four hours, but were afraid of being late as Mme. Sand exacted from us the extraordinary punctuality which she invariably practised herself.

When we met our great friend we told her of our lamentable adventure. She shrugged her shoulders, did not give us one word of commiseration, and smilingly replied: “See what you get from not smoking! Two or three cigarettes, or half a cigar, would have chased them all away. Travellers, male or female, who don't smoke, are not travellers at all.”

“And Christopher Columbus?” said Alice, my daughter, with an inquiring air; “he could not, then, claim the reputation of being a traveller, as he did not smoke?”

“You have no luck, Topaze, in your choice of an example,” replied Mme. Sand—Topaze being the name she called my daughter. “You ought to know that he discovered America with the sole object of endowing suffering humanity with the benefits of tobacco, and remember this, you most ignorant of girls, as soon as Columbus discovered the isle of Cuba, he charged two men of his ship to take him ashore. He returned saying that he had seen many men and women, Indians, with little lighted tubes, inhaling a delicious scented smoke. These happy people were smoking. When you have become learned, Mademoiselle, you will have the right to argue.” And as Alice was pouting a little, Mme. Sand added, “Come, come, be happy as the day is lovely. I am sure the ‘Dames de Meuse’ will do honor to their reputation to-day. *En route* we will have as recompense—a bushel of shrimps.”*

The site of the “Dames de Meuse” is the most charming imaginable. To get there was one of the objects of our little journey, and it was going to figure in a romance for which our distinguished friend was in search of a frame.

George Sand had an extraordinary faculty for divining places. She was conversant with geology, she knew by the composition of the earth what sort of trees and flowers would be found there. She could write about a place without ever having seen it, could describe just how the light would be thrown upon certain rocks, how it would be reflected upon the water, in the distance, on the woods. On arriving at the “Dames de Meuse,” after having thrown a rapid and searching glance around her, she said to us, with her bright smile, “I have found it. I am charmed.”

In order to reach the inn at the “Dames de Meuse” you have to take a boat. You are rowed over the most limpid waters imaginable, and for the moment turn your backs upon the rocks that they call “Les Dames de Meuse.” Once at the inn, however, they are full before you. Madame Sand looked round her in silence. She did not make a note in our presence, but till very late at night I heard her busy pen scratching away, her room being next to mine, and my daughter made the remark that our friend’s pen was still “chattering” to her paper.

To our great delight, Madame Sand wished to have breakfast

* The shrimps of Meuse are the most celebrated in France.

served in the open air. The river was babbling round the rocks. We talked of this delightful country that differed so materially from the monotonous sadness of the road from Ste. Ménéhould to Verdun. The fields that surrounded us were magnificent; the corn was commencing to ripen. Madame Sand, who had a passion for horses, had a long conversation with the inn-keeper about the race of cattle peculiar to the country. Small, but beautifully formed, they gave one the idea of possessing great strength, and looked like a cross-breed between the Dutch and English horses.

For a short time while Edmond Planchut and Adam were arranging for our trip to the rocks of the "Dames de Meuse," Madame Sand, my daughter and myself, talked romance. Madame Sand in the most natural manner interested herself in what I was doing, counselled me, and told me of her own experiences. Madame Sand, like all her generation, was averse to the peasantry; in short, she classed them with those who could not understand art. I had just conceived the idea of making the heroine of my next novel to be loved of an artisan. I wanted to make him a very noble character, with the highest regard and devotion for his family, notwithstanding the fact that his father was only a simple workman. I told my story of *Saine et Sauve* to George Sand, and it really made her very angry.

"That is truly culpable," she said to me, "to make a hero of one of those men whose only recompense for his vulgar existence is the satisfaction of making money. No, those people can never possess any poetry—that would be too much.

"It is easy enough to find a good and noble artisan, as a large number among them are, imbued with a moral grandeur that is unsurpassed, but I hold that one injures them by making poetry out of this. Simply because one of these artisans, without previous education, is filled with ambitious aspirations, but has no talent, you robe him with glory.

"Is it thus that I should form my next hero?" said Madame Sand, laughingly. "I am going to make him a violinist of genius—I have the title *Malgré Tout*. Let us hear what you will call your cotton spinner? His name will be?"

"Abel" I answered.

"Well, that's amusing! *par exemple!* That is the name of my violinist. I don't ask you to change it, we will both keep it.

You are going to make your vulgar 'patron' imaginarily instructed—in letters, in rights, in sciences—eh !”

“Certainly.”

“Mine won't know how to spell ! Allons, allons, Juliette” —Madame Sand jokingly called me thus—“I demand that you surpass yourself, that you will work at your *Saine et Sauve* with ardor, and that you will put into it all that you are capable of. It will be a tilt between us.”

“You who are so good, you are cruel now,” I replied. “How could you want me to continue my poor little book now that you have spoken of a tilt ?”

“Oh, pardon me, you are stupid, my child,” she replied. “There are always among the students some who try to equal their mistress,” said Madame Sand, and she embraced me with that effusion which she bestowed upon those whom she liked.

“Now for the boats,” cried Planchut.

“I demand a letter from Madame Sand before embarking,” called Adam ; “one never knows what may happen ; we might be shipwrecked, especially as we are with Planchut, and I want something to bribe the governors of the coast so that we can get back again.”

“I wish to observe, Adam,” said Madame Sand, “that in teasing Planchut you annoy me exceedingly.”

“What do you expect ? It is base envy,” replied Adam. “I want to have been wrecked or to save some one who has been.”

“Keep quiet, or I will hit you,” cried Madame Sand, laughing.

The water of the river was so clear that we could distinguish the plants underneath and the fish swimming among them. Adam and Planchut rowed the boat. The sun lit up the water with a thousand fires, while the shade enveloped the rocks with a vestment that nearly blotted them out. The trip was delightful and gave infinite pleasure to Madame Sand.

As we were leaving the “Dames de Meuse” Madame Sand said to us : “Now, my children, I must find a road in the forest that ascends.” We therefore set out in quest of a hilly road in the forest.

The woods of the Meuse, like those of Ardennes, are magnificent, every description of northern tree being found there. Madame Sand, as soon as she had discovered the place she wanted, got out of the carriage and walked along behind us.

Nothing could give an idea of her youth or gayety when she was on an excursion ; she pitted us one against the other, and batted our ideas about like balls, her own serving as the racket. This used to amuse her to a great extent. She walked along—her cigarette in her mouth—notwithstanding her sixty-five years, with such agility that it was with difficulty that we kept up with her. Although she appeared to be entirely occupied with us and our jokes, she nevertheless observed all that was going on about her, discovering, perhaps, in the distance some rare flower for her greenhouse, noting some effect of nature that she would afterwards write about, “taking in” the sky, the earth, and the vista with her large eyes. “She could see out of the back of her head,” my daughter used to say.

Adam, who was so serious, and who was interested in nothing but politics, never had a dull moment when near Mme. Sand, to whom he was devotedly attached. Planchut, a similar devotee, anticipated her slightest desires and I, to whom she was the greatest of women, the glory of her sex, the beloved teacher and admired mistress, was always ready either to listen to or to divert her while my daughter, who seldom conversed, but whom nothing could quiet if she thought she was in the right, interestedly listened to Mme. Sand, who returned to us affection for affection and devotion for devotion.

Our inn that night was very comfortable. Good beds, good food, good lodging. The next day Mme. Sand visited the grotto of Han on the Belgian frontier. It is one of the prettiest in the world, and she was very enthusiastic about it. She had now discovered the complete scene for *Malgré Tout*. When we returned to Nohant she said to me : “You are friends who accompany without preoccupying. A few days’ journey together brings out one’s character better than ten years in Paris. You three are all excellent, although Adam is too much of a tease about shipwrecks. I always loved you, but I think I love you all a little more since our discovery of the place which will exhilarate the personages in *Malgré Tout*.”

Another search for romantic quarters, on which Madame Sand took us, was from Dieppe to the Château d’Argues on the border of the sea. I will tell about it some other time.

In the following year, 1870, we were at Nohant, at the time when the possibilities of war were first being discussed. Madame

Sand suffered intensely from the tragic perspective that all at once presented itself to our eyes. From the first hour she anticipated defeat, but Adam believed in the victory and in the triumph of the Republic. The events of 1792 and the victories of Dumouriez recurring to his memory, he said to us :

“Do you remember our journey from Ménéhould to Verdun when I told you what Monsieur Thiers said to me ? ” He was addressing himself to Madame Sand.

“And you,” she replied, “do you recollect having told us then that never, at any epoch of our history, were we so badly prepared for it. I fear, Adam, for our country. Return to Paris, see Monsieur Thiers and tell him to do all that is possible to oppose the war. It will be the grandest act of his life.”

JULIETTE ADAM.